

What Every Man Can Do To Help End Men's Violence Against Women

Listen to women...learn from women.

The path starts with listening.

Who knows better about violence against women than women who experience it? Studies tell us that, in most countries, 50 to 100 per cent of women have experienced physical or sexual violence.

Learn about violence by asking a woman who trusts you how violence has affected her life. Then, if she feels comfortable to talk, sit back and listen. Your role isn't to challenge her on the details, nor to debate whether something really should have bothered her or not. It is to listen. Simply trust that if she tells you something hurt her, then it did hurt her.

And turn to your local women's organizations. They have a wealth of accumulated experience and knowledge. Talk to them. Read their publications. Contribute financially. Learn from them.

Learn about the problem.

Violence against women includes physical and sexual assault, sexual harassment, psychological abuse, or emotional abuse. Not all violence leaves visible scars. Emotional violence includes regular subjection to demeaning jokes, domineering forms of behavior, and sexual harassment.

Some forms of violence have a greater physical or emotional impact than others. But all forms of violence contribute to the very real fear and suffering that women in our society endure. The basic rights that most men enjoy - safety in their homes, ability to go out at night, a job free of harassment - are a source of fear for women in much of the world.

The fear is greatest in women's own homes. A common myth is that most violence against women is committed by strangers. In fact, women are most at risk from men they know--husbands, boyfriends, fathers, relatives, employers, and care givers.

Most men love and care about women. And yet frightening numbers commit acts of violence against the women they say they love. It occurs throughout the world, among the rich, the poor, and the middle class, and among those of every nationality, religion, and race

Learn why some men are violent.

Men are not naturally violent. There have been societies with little or no violence. Studies over the past century have found that half of the tribal societies studied had little or no violence against women, against children, or among men. Furthermore, even today, in many countries the majority of men are not physically violent.

Violence is something that some men learn. Men's violence is a result of the way many men learn to express their masculinity in relationships with women, children, and other men. Many men learn to think of power as the ability to dominate and control the people and the world around them. This way of thinking makes the use of violence acceptable to many men.

Most individual acts of men's violence are a pathetic attempt to assert control over women, children, or other men. Paradoxically, most violent acts by men are a sign of weakness, insecurity, and lack of self-esteem combined with a capacity for physical or verbal domination and a feeling that they should be superior and in control.

Women are not immune from committing acts of violence. Women's groups have spoken out against the problem of violence against children, which is committed by both women and men, although most sexual abuse of children is by men. Women too can be violent against men or other women, but it is far less common than violence by men.

In many violent incidents, men have been drinking alcohol. This might be because alcohol unleashes feelings, fears, rage, and insecurities that some men, cut off from their feelings, cannot handle.

But alcohol doesn't cause violence. Genes don't cause violence. Ultimately, it is the attempts by some men to dominate women, adults' attempts to dominate children, and some men's attempts to dominate other men or groups of men. Violence is a way of asserting power, privilege, and control.

Wear a white ribbon.

Change will occur if we each accept personal responsibility to make sure it happens. As men who care about the women in our lives, we can take responsibility to help make sure women live free from fear and violence.

Wearing a white ribbon is your personal pledge never to commit violence against women. It is a personal pledge not to condone acts of violence, not to make excuses for perpetrators of violence, and not to think that any woman "asks for it."

It is a pledge not to remain silent. It is a pledge to challenge the men around us to act to end violence.

Wearing a ribbon provokes discussion, debate, and soul-searching among the men around us. The ribbon is a catalyst for discussion. It is a catalyst for change.

Challenge sexist language and jokes that degrade women.

Sexist jokes and language help create a climate where forms of violence and abuse have too long been accepted. Words that degrade women reflect a society that has historically placed women in a second class position. By reflecting this reality they once again put women "in their place" even if that isn't the intention.

One of the most difficult things for men is to learn to challenge other men. To challenge sexist language. To challenge men who talk lightly of violence against women. And to challenge men who engage in violence.

Learn to identify and oppose sexual harassment and violence in your workplace, school and family.

Sexual harassment refers to unwanted sexual advances or sexually-oriented remarks or behavior that are unwelcome by another person. Flirting and joking are fine if they are consensual and wanted. But sexual harassment poisons the environment.

Harassment is ultimately about inequalities of power. The same action done by a woman might not bother a man because, in general, our society has not given women power over men.

Men can join women in opposing sexual harassment by supporting efforts in our workplaces and schools to create a healthy and productive environment.

Support local women's programs.

Around the world, dedicated women have created support services for women who are survivors of men's violence: shelters for battered women, rape crisis centers, counseling services, and legal aid clinics. Women escaping violent situations depend on these services.

These and other women's organizations deserve men's support and our financial backing. That's why we encourage local White Ribbon campaigns to raise money for local women's programs.

Examine how your own behavior might contribute to the problem.

If you've ever been physically violent against a woman, if you've committed sexual assault, if you've hit, pushed, threatened, kicked your spouse or girlfriend, then you have been part of the problem.

If this happened long ago admit what you did was wrong and make amends if possible. But if your violent behavior has any chance of continuing, then you urgently need to get help getting to the root of your problem. Don't wait until it happens again. Please act today.

Many men will never be physically or sexually violent. But let's examine ways we might try to control women. Do we dominate conversations? Do we put them down? Do we limit their activities?

Whether or not you've ever been violent, all men must take responsibility for ending all forms of violence.

Work towards long-term solutions.

Ending violence against women won't happen over-night. Real solutions are truly long-term solutions. This is because men's violence against women is rooted in inequalities between men and women, and in the way men learn to be men.

Legal changes to combat men's violence against women (such as laws against rape and battering) are very important. The police and courts must diligently enforce such laws.

But this is not enough. Let's work together to change our attitudes and behavior. Let's challenge the institutions which perpetuate inequality between women and men.

Let's help men be better men by getting rid of our suits of armor, that is, attitudes which equate masculinity with the power to control. Let's make positive changes in our relationships with women, children, and other men. Let's involve men as caregivers and nurturers of the young.

Changes in attitude, behavior, and institutions take time. And so we must look at how we raise future generations. We must teach our children, by example, that all forms of violence are unacceptable, and that for boys to become men, they do not need to control or dominate women, men, or children.

Get involved with the White Ribbon Campaign's educational efforts.

The White Ribbon Campaign (WRC) is the largest effort in the world of men working to end men's violence against women.

The WRC is a grass-roots effort relying mainly on volunteers. Because the purpose of the campaign is for men to take responsibility for working to end violence against women, it is an organization of men. But we greatly appreciate the help and support of women.

Aside from organizing the annual wearing of white ribbons (starting November 25 for one or two weeks), local supporters can do other things during the year:

- Give talks in schools, communities, and workplaces.
- Raise money for women's groups.
- Organize special events to support positive roles for men.
- Talk to young people about building healthy relationships.
- Start a local White Ribbon Campaign and financially support the work of the WRC.